

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000244

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA/PI, NEA/ARPI  
ABU DHABI FOR MEPI (HWECHSEL)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KMPI](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: IRI FINALLY BREAKS DOWN THE DOOR TO OMANI  
PARLIAMENT

-----  
Summary  
-----

1. (SBU) The International Republican Institute finally succeeded this month in carrying out a training program for elected Omani parliamentarians that the Majlis' President had vowed for five years would never be permitted. Twelve deputies and a senior staffer participated in a 3-day workshop on critical reading of legislation, and came away insisting on further courses. Finally having undergone a change of heart, the Majlis President at the end asked IRI why the workshop lasted only a few days. After investing five years' of effort in winning over Oman's elected quasi-parliament, IRI now faces the task of winning over MEPI funds to continue its work. The Embassy strongly endorses IRI's continued presence in Oman. End summary.

-----  
Winning the Trial  
-----

2. (SBU) International Republican Institute (IRI) Middle East Program Officer Omar Alvi briefed Pol/Econ Chief on February 9 about a ground-breaking training program February 5-7 conducted at the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council) that, for the first time in IRI's five years of work with the Majlis, included elected deputies as opposed to only staff. The "workshop" on reading draft legislation grew out of a similar program IRI conducted in 2004 with Majlis staffers that so impressed Majlis Secretary General Abdul Qadir al-Dhahab that he asked that it be extended to members as a special trial.

3. (SBU) The twelve participants in the 3-day, 9-hour event (called a "workshop" to avoid offending the members with the term "training") included Majlis Vice President Ishaq al-Siyabi, the chairpersons of four Majlis committees (and two deputy chairpersons), and the director of the Secretary General's office. One of the Majlis' two female members was among those taking part.

4. (SBU) Despite initial worries over how the members would respond to an Egyptian trainer (Mahmoud Sabrah), and constant interruptions on Day 1 from members' cell phones, the audience eventually warmed enthusiastically to the subject matter and ended the workshop insisting on more such opportunities. Female deputy Rahila al-Riyami, who chairs the Education and Culture Committee, forcefully insisted that cell phones be turned off early on Day 2, from which point members began in earnest to engage on the subject matter. By Day 3, Alvi reported that the members' discussions grew positively "risky" in the amount of frank criticism they expressed toward the Majlis' circumscribed legislative role and the government's dismissive attitude towards it.

-----  
Majlis Asking for More  
-----

5. (SBU) Sabrah used two pieces of legislation previously passed by the Majlis (one on the medical profession and the other on consumer protection) as his case studies in critical reading. By the end of the course, Vice President al-Siyabi asked in mock outrage how he and his colleagues could have approved such flawed bills once the course had helped them recognize gaps and contradictions in the government-drafted laws. The members asked IRI in their feedback for further in-depth study on critical reading of legislation, as well as a broader array of other legislative courses. Vice President al-Siyabi told Alvi that he would recommend a continuation of the IRI training to Majlis President Sheikh Abdullah al-Qatabi, but urged IRI to raise it with the President as well in light of the President's infamous opposition to member "training". When meeting with Sheikh Abdullah for their out-brief, the Majlis President asked why the IRI training had only lasted three days, indicating that his opposition had finally been overcome. (Note: IRI diplomatically kept mum on the fact that the Majlis Secretary

General had restricted them to 3 days for this initial trial, primarily on the basis of his fear of offending Sheikh Abdullah. End note.)

-----  
Comment  
-----

16. (SBU) While this 3-day IRI course may sound modest by standards elsewhere, it is positively ground-breaking in the Omani context. Majlis President Sheikh Abdullah al-Qatabi is famously sensitive to outside "interference" in his Council, and quick to take offense at perceived slights. As recently as 2004, Qatabi had told us that it was wholly inappropriate for elected members of the Majlis to undergo "training," saying that any interaction with the USG would have to be on a peer basis with fellow parliamentarians. The UK Embassy has dealt with similar restrictions, although the Brits have had better luck enlisting its MP's in exchanges with their counterparts in the Majlis. But just as IRI has finally crossed this rubicon, its existing funding is running out. Without MEPI approval of its new project proposal, IRI's first program with Majlis deputies could well be its last, and any successor NGO seeking to fill the void will likely face years of work to win anew the Majlis' confidence. The Embassy would hate to see IRI's careful cultivation of the Majlis al-Shura go to waste and strongly endorses continued MEPI funding for IRI efforts in training the Majlis al-Shura..  
BALTIMORE